

ALUMNI PROFILES

At Peace

Michelle Mendez '08 pursues her public interest passion.

LOCATED in the heart of Bangkok, Thailand, Chulalongkorn University resides on the former grounds of Crown Prince Vajirunhis. The campus, shrouded in tranquil shade and dotted with palatial buildings, seemed an apt setting for alumna Michelle Mendez '08 to study peace and conflict resolution.

Mendez was named one of 20 Rotary Peace fellows to study at the Rotary Center for International Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution at Chulalongkorn University. Mendez represented the United States and her native Colombia, and was joined by fellows representing India, Germany, Turkey, Kenya, Argentina, Nicaragua, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Canada, and Pakistan among others. The program was established by The Rotary Foundation to promote greater tolerance and cooperation among people worldwide.

"I look forward to grappling with difficult issues of conflict and learning how to build the common ground needed to arrive at peace," said Mendez when she was selected to the program. "With so many of us representing different experiences and perspectives, our time together in Thailand will surely be one of personal development, fulfillment, and epiphanies."

"SERVING the public interest was the impetus for me pursuing a legal career. I am blessed to have had the support of so many, including wonderful law school professors, to make my public interest legal career dream a reality. Nothing is more fulfilling, challenging, or important to the fabric of our society than public interest work."

—Michelle Mendez '08



Michelle Mendez '08 visits the Golden Triangle with other Rotary Fellows during a field study to northern Thailand.

After completing the three-month program at the Rotary Center, Mendez received a professional development certificate in peace and conflict resolution, and became part of an elite group of more than 680 Rotary Peace Fellows working in high-level positions worldwide.

Mendez's law school studies and professional career have been dedicated to public interest issues. While at UM Carey Law, she was the grant coordinator for the Maryland Public Interest Law Project (MPILP) and in 2006, Mendez was a Summer MPILP Grant Recipient, working as a legal intern at CASA de Maryland, Inc. Mendez also interned at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in San Jose, Costa Rica, as well as Ayuda, Inc.

Upon graduating, she was awarded the William P. Cunningham Award for Exceptional Achievement and Service, as well as the MPILP Annual Leadership in Public Interest Student Pro Bono Award.

"Michelle's determination to embrace leadership opportunities through MPILP and the law school Clinical Law Program demonstrated a drive and initiative to pursue creative ways to make a difference in the public interest field," said Law School Associate Professor Maureen Sweeney.

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Mendez is now working as senior attorney at Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington Immigration Legal Services, where she was previously the 2008-2010 DLA Piper Equal Justice Works Fellow. She is also an adjunct faculty professor at Catholic University Columbus School of Law, where she co-teaches the immigration clinic and serves as a faculty member for Shemer Bar Review, LLC. ■